

## ALUMNI NOTE

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## Future Planning: Steps to Running Your Own Business

Establishing and running my own management consulting company in booming Western Australia is the ideal situation for me, but getting to this stage has been the result not of careful planning, but of a combination of choices, luck, accident and, of course, hard work and to a certain extent foresight.

### Step One: Get a "Full" Education, on Life, People and the Universe!

I achieved my University Entrance qualifications in New Zealand early enough to allow me to spend nine months prior to university as Office Assistant for a small importing and wholesaling firm where I gained my first taste of business and of company ownership. Having visited the US on family trips, my plan was to undertake combined liberal arts and business degrees in New Zealand, work for a couple of years, then complete an MBA in the US, afterwards living and working there. That was, however, the extent of my well thought-out career plan! Already having undergraduate business qualifications, I was able to waive a number of the first-year core courses and take more advanced, varied and small group subjects, allowing me to focus both on finance and on marketing and strategy. I sought involvement, too, in university life outside of the rigorous study (and job applications) and participated in the *Orientation Committee* and was Cast Coordinator on the GSB *Follies*, as well as a competitor in the *Marketing Brand Challenge*.

### Step Two: Be Flexible and Consider All Options

My first post-MBA job was in strategic

planning at NutraSweet. It was at a fascinating time for the company with the aspartame patent due to expire, which meant significant analysis on existing business models and competition, as well as potential new areas. It was an important foundation for the strategic orientation of a number of my later senior marketing roles, and eventually, my current consultancy.

### Step Three: Challenge Yourself

I decided Europe would be an interesting next chapter and accepted an international marketing position at Yoplait in France. My role had a good balance of strategic and implementation work overseeing large established markets in the US and Canada, and the launch into new markets in Scandinavia and Mexico. I found that experiencing so many different cultures, understanding the effect of the European Union as it evolved, and learning a new language were all challenging and extremely interesting. At Yoplait I also had the opportunity to spend six months in the French sales force, an experience I later appreciated when supervising sales staff.

### Step Four: Identify Your Priorities and Build Your Experience Base

Eventually, I decided it was time to be closer to home after almost a decade overseas. Sydney, Australia was my choice since it was both the business hub for Australia and a gateway to Asia. I moved to Kellogg's in Australia managing some of their flagship teen and children's brands – and then onto several other branded B2B and consumer corporates over the next decade in Sydney. Prior to Sarah Richardson Consulting, I managed for three years the national sales,

marketing and customer service functions for a small family-owned importer and producer of craft products distributing to many small retailers and large chain stores around Australia.

### Step Five: Follow Your Dreams

Upon relocating to Perth in early 2004, I felt confident about the type of work I enjoyed, the people I enjoyed working with, and my breadth and level of experience and set up my own management consultancy. I also joined several business and non-business groups to keep up to date with business issues, broaden my social network and contribute to the community. And I have never looked back!

### About the Author

Sarah Richardson brings a blend of experience and skills to the management consulting arena. In 2004 she founded Sarah Richardson Consulting Pty Ltd to provide sales, marketing and management consulting for small to medium sized firms based in Western Australia. The firm consults across resources, tourism, retail, franchising, government, B2B services, consumer goods, industrial and technology sectors.

Ms. Richardson achieved the *Top Business Student Award* at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand in 1983 and gained a *Fulbright Grant* in 1985. In 2007 she was awarded the *Australian Institute of Company Directors/Women on Boards Scholarship*. Ms. Richardson welcomes contact from current students and alumni at [srichardson@srconsulting.com.au](mailto:srichardson@srconsulting.com.au). □